

Michigan - 1st District

1 John Conyers Jr. (D)

Of Detroit — Elected 1964

Born: May 16, 1929, Detroit, Mich.
Education: Wayne State U., B.A. 1957, LL.B. 1958.
Military Career: Army, 1950-54.
Occupation: Lawyer.
Family: Single.
Religion: Baptist.
Political Career: No previous office.
Capitol Office: 2313 Rayburn Bldg. 20515; 225-5126.



In Washington: Conyers has carried his image as a rebel within House ranks beyond his junior years and into the period when most members have become power brokers in their own right. His abrasive and sarcastic style makes it difficult for him to accomplish legislative goals that require coordination with other members.

A nine-term veteran at 54, Conyers has come within four places of the Judiciary Committee chairmanship. But his Crime Subcommittee moved relatively few pieces of legislation during six years under his leadership, and some of those went to the floor over his objections. In 1981, when Judiciary reorganized its subcommittees, Conyers took over the one on Criminal Justice, with authority over changes in federal criminal law.

Conyers' main reason for switching was to prevent the Criminal Justice panel from reporting out a new federal criminal code. Such a bill had cleared Judiciary in 1979 but never reached the floor in the 96th Congress.

It was clear from the outset that Conyers, who felt a new code would give federal prosecutors too much power, did not want to move on the legislation. Republicans on the Criminal Justice Subcommittee tried to have the panel discharged from the issue, but without success.

Finally the full Judiciary Committee imposed a deadline of January 31, 1982, for Conyers to take action. Conyers, who called charges of obstruction against him "absolutely preposterous," finally introduced a modest criminal code reform of his own. But the deadline came and went without any action, and in May, after the Senate gave up on a criminal code bill, the pressure on Conyers ended. His panel finally approved a version of the legislation in December, far too late for any floor action.

Meanwhile, Conyers' old Crime Subcommittee, now led by William J. Hughes of New Jersey, produced a new anti-crime pack-

age that included federal measures against drug traffic and a "career criminal" provision allowing repeat offenders to be tried in federal court. Conyers actively opposed the measure, arguing that it had been slapped together at the end of the session without adequate preparation.

Gun control has been Conyers' main legislative priority over the past decade, and he continues to plead its case, although he has given up the chairmanship of the panel dealing with it. In 1976 the full Judiciary panel reported out a bill banning the domestic manufacture of "Saturday Night Specials" and similar handguns. It was a weaker measure than Conyers wanted, but it had some Republican support, and it represented a tangible achievement for the gun control forces. It never reached the House floor, however, and nothing like it has in the years since.

Outside Judiciary, Conyers has a record of challenging Democratic leaders on a variety of causes. After complaining that House Democrats should have punished five Mississippi members for failing to back the party's 1968 national ticket, he became a frequent leadership critic. In 1971 he waged a symbolic campaign for Speaker against Carl Albert of Oklahoma. He received 20 votes to Albert's 200. Two years later, accusing Albert of "stagnation and reaction," he ran against Albert again. This time the score was 202-25.

He had some of the same problems with the Carter administration. Not long after Jimmy Carter became president, Conyers began complaining that the White House had forgotten a 1976 campaign promise to back the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment legislation. "We're being bulldozed by a fantastically successful new administration in the White House," Conyers said in 1977, calling facetiously for a "national day of prayer" to focus

John Conyers Jr., D-Mich.

Michigan 1

Detroit was not all that special at the turn of the century. It brewed beer and turned out carriages and stoves, and its complacent citizens took to calling it "the most beautiful city in America." But Henry Ford's first large factory in Highland Park, built in 1909, was followed by others, plants put up by Buick, R. E. Olds and the Fisher brothers. The north side of Detroit became a sea of single- and double-family houses for the workers who flocked to the assembly lines from rural Michigan, Appalachia and Eastern Europe.

The 1st, now overwhelmingly black (71 percent) and Democratic, is generally better off than its inner-city neighbor, the 13th. More of its homes are owner-occupied, and its residents are better educated. The racially mixed communities north of Seven Mile Road have a high percentage of professionals and white-collar city employees living in well-preserved pre-war houses.

East of Southfield Road, the neighborhoods are poorer and more exclusively

Detroit — North Central; Highland Park

black. Both skilled and unskilled blacks live in Highland Park and in the area north of the University of Detroit.

Highland Park, a city entirely surrounded by Detroit, is the home of the Chrysler Corporation. Once a white ethnic bastion, Highland Park is now 84 percent black. Although the city retained its middle-class character through most of the 1960s and early 1970s, hard times and rising unemployment have hurt its increasingly marginal neighborhoods.

The several white enclaves in the district include Poles living in the northeast corner, north of Hamtramck, and middle-class ethnics around the Southfield Freeway in the southwest. These voters tend to be older and more conservative.

Population: 514,560. White 137,827 (27%), Black 364,021 (71%). Spanish origin 10,587 (2%). 18 and over 349,182 (68%), 65 and over 47,777 (9%). Median age: 28.

national attention on the "Carter dilemma."

The congressman's role as an "elder militant" in the House and the Democratic Party is not the one observers would have predicted in his early congressional years. Elected to the House in 1964 at age 35, he represented a new activist generation of blacks in politics and was attracting notice: "He is without question the leading Negro spokesman in the House," the *Chicago Tribune* wrote of him in 1967, "and seems to be moving rapidly toward the spot of leading Negro spokesman in the country."

Conyers served on the committee that investigated misconduct charges against Adam Clayton Powell, the black representative from New York, and signed the committee report that recommended Powell's censure, cooperating with House leaders but earning the scorn of Powell, once his political hero, who called Conyers "a black Judas."

In his second term, Conyers almost single-handedly caused the defeat of a redistricting bill that would have permitted malapportioned states to delay the redrawing of congressional districts for five years. In 1968 he held back his support for Hubert H. Humphrey until late in Humphrey's fall presidential campaign, joining up in Detroit in October with a rousing speech

that attracted national attention and was thought to influence a portion of the black vote in Humphrey's direction. The next year, he led seven of the nine black members of Congress to the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify against Clement Haynsworth's nomination to the Supreme Court.

The current Conyers seems more of a legislative and political outsider than the one of a decade ago. In 1979 he missed 56 percent of the House roll calls, more than any other healthy member. Since then his attendance record has improved, although his 73 percent score for 1982 was one of the lower ones in the House.

At Home: Conyers is no outsider in the mostly black inner-city district he represents. In every general election in which he has faced opposition, his winning percentage has increased over the previous time. Even the unfavorable publicity he received from his low attendance record in 1979 did not hurt him. In 1982 he did not have GOP opposition.

The son of an auto worker, Conyers became interested in politics while in law school and worked loyally in the party apparatus. The creation in 1964 of a second black-majority district in Detroit gave him his first opportunity. He ran on a platform of "Equality, Jobs

Michigan - 1st District

and Peace," pledging to strengthen the United Nations and to exempt low-income families from paying federal income tax.

Among the qualifications Conyers cited for holding office were three years as a district aide to Rep. John D. Dingell and service on a panel of lawyers picked by President Kennedy to look for ways of easing racial tensions in the South. Conyers won the primary by just 108 votes over Richard H. Austin, a Detroit accountant who has remained a political rival ever since.

Racial troubles in Conyers' district exploded in 1967, when rioting destroyed many blocks in the heart of the district. Conyers was booed when he stood atop a car telling rioters

to return to their homes. Later his office was gutted by fire. But those episodes had no lasting political impact, nor did his initial reluctance to support Humphrey in 1968.

Conyers' only two primary challenges have been token affairs. Nevertheless, his relationships with Mayor Coleman A. Young and the United Auto Workers — the major political powers of Detroit — are not particularly friendly. Some Conyers partisans were worried that he might have trouble in the 1982 re-districting process; his district had lost substantial population, and the state had to give up one seat in the House. But Conyers' territory remained basically intact.

Committees

Government Operations (4th of 25 Democrats)
Commerce, Consumer and Monetary Affairs; Intergovernmental Relations and Human Resources.

Judiciary (5th of 20 Democrats)
Criminal Justice (chairman); Civil and Constitutional Rights.

Elections

1982 General
John Conyers Jr. (D) 125,517 (97%)

1980 General
John Conyers Jr. (D) 123,286 (95%)
William Bell (R) 6,244 (5%)

Previous Winning Percentages: 1978 (93%) 1976 (92%)
1974 (91%) 1972 (88%) 1970 (88%) 1968 (100%)
1966 (84%) 1964 (84%)

District Vote For President

1980		1976	
D	143,653 (86%)	D	148,065 (84%)
R	19,341 (12%)	R	27,136 (15%)
I	3,471 (2%)		

Campaign Finance

	Receipts	Receipts from PACs	Expenditures
1982			
Conyers (D)	\$20,677	\$15,050 (73%)	\$16,738
1980			
Conyers (D)	\$23,788	\$13,400 (56%)	\$20,343

Voting Studies

Year	Presidential Support		Party Unity		Conservative Coalition	
	S	O	S	O	S	O
1982	22	60	68	8	8	75
1981	32	59	78	9	9	85
1980	56	29	76	8	8	80
1979	34	10	46	6	2	40
1978	49	11	47	6	4	48
1977	59	24	73	9	6	77

1976	8	61	60	7	7	62
1975	27	52	61	5	4	61
1974 (Ford)	24	56				
1974	26	53	72	12	5	76
1973	20	50	64	8	2	65
1972	41	43	74	9	5	84
1971	19	61	60	7	2	67
1970	23	35	56	13	2	61
1969	19	45	55	11	4	69
1968	40	7	43	5	2	55
1967	56	17	65	10	4	76
1966	57	9	65	5	0	84
1965	77	7	73	3	0	76

S = Support

O = Opposition

Key Votes

Reagan budget proposal (1981)	N
Legal services reauthorization (1981)	Y
Disapprove sale of AWACs planes to Saudi Arabia (1981)	Y
Index income taxes (1981)	N
Subsidize home mortgage rates (1982)	Y
Amend Constitution to require balanced budget (1982)	N
Delete MX funding (1982)	Y
Retain existing cap on congressional salaries (1982)	N
Adopt nuclear freeze (1983)	Y

Interest Group Ratings

Year	ADA	ACA	AFL-CIO	CCUS
1982	80	12	88	6
1981	90	5	93	0
1980	78	25	89	59
1979	79	13	100	8
1978	45	11	94	21
1977	85	8	87	19
1976	75	12	86	0
1975	79	9	89	25
1974	87	17	89	0
1973	72	11	100	0
1972	88	6	91	17
1971	76	17	78	-
1970	92	21	100	10
1969	100	29	100	-
1968	100	6	75	-
1967	100	10	100	0
1966	94	14	100	-
1965	100	0	-	10